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EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYRACUSE.

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THE MAYOR OF SYRACUSE, NEW YORK, STATES HIS REASONS FOR SUPPORTING THE PROPOSED CAMPUS SCHOOL PLAN FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, A CAMPUS FACILITY OR EDUCATIONAL PARK TO REPLACE SEVERAL OUTDATED NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS. THE MAYOR SUPPORTS THE PLAN BECAUSE (1) RACIAL BALANCE WILL IMPROVE, (2) THE CITY'S TAX BASE WILL BE PROTECTED BEACUSE CITY-OWNED SITES ON THE PERIPHERY WILL BE SELECTED FOR THE CAMPUS, AND (3) "EXCELLENT" FACILITIES CAN BE PROVIDED WITHOUT UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION. HE ALSO ANTICIPATES THAT SUBURBANITES MIGHT RETURN TO THE CITY IF THERE ARE QUALITY SCHOOLS AND SERVICES, ESPECIALLY NOW WHEN SUBURBAN TAXES ARE RISING. HE EMPHASIZES THAT FEDERAL AID TO CITIES IS URGENTLY NEEDED FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT AND THAT THE MOST EFFICIENT WAY TO USE SUCH MONIES IS BY CHANNELING IT INTO URBAN OPERATING BUDGETS RATHER THAN THROUGH THE MODEL CITIES APPROACH. THIS STATEMENT WAS MADE AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA'S CITIES, SPONSORED BY THE U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS, WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 16-18, 1967. (NH)

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EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYRACUSE

A Statement by
William F. Walsh, Mayor, Syracuse, New York
for the
National Conference on Equal Educational Opportunity
in America's Cities
sponsored by the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C.
November 16-18, 1967

We in Syracuse look at the matter of segregation in our public schools in the same light we look at segregation in any other walk of life. We are convinced that segregation in America in any form is wrong. In our judgment, it is not only wrong, it is immoral, grossly wasteful of human ability and talent, and contrary to everything we stand for in this country.

The pattern of segregation that has existed in our schools in Syracuse has been a neighborhood pattern. I have been in favor of the neighborhood school concept, but if the neighborhood system is to continue, we must constantly be alert to preventing these schools from perpetuating racial segregation.

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Three years ago, we faced a problem of segregation in two of our inner-city schools. We had pressure from various civil rights groups to do something about correcting the racial imbalance that existed. Our Board of Education recognized that something needed to be done, not just because the schools were predominantly Negro, but also because tests showed that students in those schools were not performing at their level of ability. Despite sincere efforts to improve these schools through special educational programs, the

students were not improving as much as we would have wished. Our School Board, therefore, voted to close these schools and to bus the 900 students to predominantly white schools. If a mayor is to exercise any leadership in the community, he has to support the decisions of other departments, and as Mayor, I was happy to lend my support to the Board of Education's decision to desegregate the schools. Similarly, I intend to lend my support to what we call in Syracuse the Campus Plan.

The Campus Plan, developed after considerable study, calls for the construction of a campus-type facility or education park, to replace several outdated neighborhood schools. It would be located in an area outside of the old neighborhoods, preferably on the perimeter of the city. Eventually, three or four campus schools would be developed, as ~~the neighborhood~~ elementary schools in our system are retired over a period of years.

The end of segregation, brought on by campus schools, will not immediately destroy the concept of neighborhood schools, for the older schools will be replaced slowly. While the Campus Plan is being developed, there will be a better racial balance in the remaining neighborhood schools.

I am personally convinced that if we can achieve better racial balance in our schools, all children, both white and Negro, will benefit. I feel that it will be a challenge for the Negro student to try to achieve beyond the white student, academically, just as he has achieved in so many fields of athletic endeavor. There will

be a similar challenge for the white student to try to achieve both on the athletic field and in the classroom. There are other benefits for both races, but most importantly, I am convinced that it is the right thing to do.

Those of us who are concerned with the Campus Plan feel that the major problem in its implementation in Syracuse will be financing because it is difficult to factor the estimated $7 million cost of the first campus school into our regular capital improvement program. I fully expect that our board of education and our Common Council will vote to begin construction of campus schools, but we are going to need financial help from higher levels of Government. I can see no other way of doing it.

I hope that New York State will soon recognize the fact that the cities have been discriminated against for many years in financial aid for school construction. Suburban and rural districts have been receiving reimbursement on school building projects, but the cities have not, and this discrepancy should end. We will also need Federal aid. We could start tomorrow if we could get school construction aid on the same basis as we receive urban renewal assistance. I know of no better urban renewal than new schools.

There are two factors about campus schools which make them more attractive than new, neighborhood schools. We can help protect our tax base in the city and we can provide excellent facilities for all children without needless duplication.

Any city is haunted by the specter of a shrinking tax base. To meet the present site standards of the State Department of Education for building neighborhood schools, we would need ten acres for each school. The schools to be replaced are now on much smaller sites, so additional property would have to be acquired which would result in a tax loss we cannot afford. Campus sites, on the other hand, are projected for periphery sites that are already city-owned or would be relatively inexpensive to acquire. When the campus school is ready, the sites on which stand the old neighborhood schools can be sold for multiple-dwelling development, thus increasing our tax rolls. We have already sold several former school sites with good results.

The second plus factor is that in one campus school we can provide shared facilities rather than having to duplicate these facilities in several neighborhood schools. Thus, a library, a gymnasium or a cafeteria, as well as outdoor recreational facilities, would be shared by hundreds of students.

Education has probably the highest priority of any of the problems we have in Syracuse, but we still have to fight fires and enforce the laws, provide parks and recreation programs, install traffic lights and dispose of wastes. The long-run savings in campus schools will help us to provide both excellent education and excellent services in the city of Syracuse.

One other matter that concerns me is that of a trend which exists in our surrounding suburban areas where taxpayers have the right to vote on school budgets. Parent and teacher groups have long maintained that the taxpayer would pay any price for education, but after seeing a number of suburban school budgets defeated several times before a drastically reduced substitute is finally approved, I am certain that the old attitude no longer prevails. It is conceivable the cost of the proposed Campus Plan in the city may meet serious taxpayer resistance. However if the plan for campus schools is implemented, it just may be that we may reverse the flight to suburbia. If through the excellence of schools and service we can make the city more attractive for the suburbanite who is now beginning to feel the pinch of soaring school, real estate, sewer and water taxes, we may be able to attract him back into the city. This is especially possible if we can offer a quality of education equal or superior to that his children are receiving in suburbia.

I am pleased that our school system has moved slowly in planning for the campus school project. I approve this type of approach. We have made an exhaustive study of the entire plan. We still need more planning in the entire field of the social aspects. We are moving toward an integrated metropolitan planning agency, combining the city and county planning departments, and there are many who are hopeful that one of these days we'll be able to integrate social planning as well. If this is done, educational services will be planned as a

unit for our metropolitan area, just as are health and welfare services are planned for on a metropolitan basis.

In summary, it is necessary to recognize once again that the needs of all of the cities in this country are desperate. My personal position, and the official position of the United States Conference of Mayors, is that we need a commitment from the President and from the Congress to spend billions of dollars in the cities of this country just as we are now spending money in space. There is no other way of solving the problems our cities are faced with. The model cities approach that has been established by the Administration and by Congress is not the answer. All it does is promote a competition to see which cities can develop the most grandiose schemes to spend Federal monies. If instead, the same money were channeled into the operating budgets of our cities, we could do a much better job of utilizing these funds. Certainly in any plan of revitalizing our cities, the out-worn educational facilities in the cities deserve the high priority of the Federal Government, and we feel that this is at the top of the list in Syracuse.